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The Municipality of
Metropolitan Toronto

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J. Richard Picherack, Commissioner

METROPOLITAN
TORONTO
CENTRAL

February 8, 1985

To: Community Services & Housing Committee

From: Commissioner of Community Services

Subject: Metropolitan Toronto's Submission to the Federal Task Force on Child Care

Background:

On September 13, 1984, the Community Services and Housing Committee considered a proposed submission from the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto to the Federal Task Force on Child Care. The original submission contained a synopsis of Council approved positions on a number of contemporary day care issues. The proposal was revised October 2, 1984, at the request of Committee by including reference to additional child care issues currently under review in Metropolitan Toronto. These additional issues included the role of the municipality in the provision of informal day care and the review of strategies which Metropolitan Toronto as an employer might use to assist employees with child care costs.

When the revised proposal was discussed by the Council of Metropolitan Toronto at its October 23, 1984, meeting it was referred back to Community Services & Housing Committee for further consultation with elected officials. As a result of deputations made at the November 8, 1984, meeting of Community Services & Housing Committee and written proposals submitted subsequently by members of Metropolitan Toronto Council, the proposed submission to the Federal Task Force has again been revised and augmented to include the suggestions of elected representatives.

Since the time that the original Metropolitan Toronto proposed submission was drafted and presented to Committee in September, the structure and mandate of the original four-person Minister appointed Federal Task Force on Child Care has changed. The new federal government in its November 5th Speech from the Throne acknowledged the need for accessible, affordable child care as a pressing item on its social agenda. In an effort to reach a national consensus on options in this area a Parliamentary Task Force on the Future of Child Care in Canada was announced. It is expected that this new parliamentary task force will utilize the submissions invited by the original Federal Task Force on Child Care established by The Honourable Judy Erola, then Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Proposed Revisions Incorporated into the Submission:

The revised submission is shown in Appendix I. It has been expanded in the following ways:

(a) Introduction

An introduction has been added. The introductory section provides an opportunity to commend the new government on their announcement of a parliamentary task force on child care and to set the stage for the Corporation's brief by summarizing some basic facts about the demography of the Metropolitan Toronto population served.

(b) Key Day Care Issues

The discussion of some key day care issues has been expanded and supplemented by appending several additional public documents. In particular, the sections dealing with affordability, school-aged children, informal day care and designated special needs neighbourhoods have been expanded. Sections dealing with the low salaries of day care workers and work place day care have also been added. And the following additional public documents have been included as appendices:

(1) Appendix F - "The Board of Education for the City of North York: Staff Response to the Report Toward a Coordinated Child Care System in North York, May 1984".

(2) Appendix G - "Resolution from the Human Services Advisory Council, City of North York, Parks and Recreation Department regarding Child Care and the Parks & Recreation Mandate, June 7, 1984."

(3) Appendix H - "Toward a Co-ordinated Child Care System in North York, North York Interagency Council, December 1983".

(4) Appendix I - "Resolution from the Neighbourhoods Committee of the City of Toronto regarding the City of Toronto Day Care Grants Program, November 17, 1983"

(c) Additional Suggestions

Several additional suggestions for inclusion in the revised submission were made by elected officials. These suggestions included:

(1) Universal Access

A concluding statement that Metropolitan Toronto supports the principle that universal access to good child care be the primary goal of a national child care policy has been added.

(2) Equity of Federal Funding

It was also suggested that the submission contain a reference to Metropolitan Toronto's concern about the lack of child care funding equity across the country and indicate support for a uniform Canada-wide system. This position is based on an implied dissatisfaction with the current Canada Assistance Plan, C.A.P., and its cost sharing provision. The section identifying the need to exempt designated neighbourhoods with high concentrations of special needs families from the needs testing required by Ontario's C.A.P. agreement has been expanded. It now includes the recommendation that the current cost sharing available to the provinces under C.A.P. requires general review and revision.

(3) Work Place Child Care

It was suggested that Metropolitan Toronto should be playing a lead role in initiating and expanding work place day care across Metropolitan Toronto. Reference to this future role by the municipality has been added to the Corporation's submission.

Issue:

Staff have incorporated all suggestions submitted to Controller Greene by members of Council. However, the Department is concerned that several of these new proposals do not have formal Council approval. These have been highlighted below for your particular consideration during the review of the latest revised submission.

(1) Equity of Federal Funding

In Section 4 of the Submission, the section entitled "Child Care for Special Needs Families", a paragraph has been added to reflect Metropolitan Toronto's concern with the lack of funding equity for child care across the country and to recommend a review and revision of the current cost sharing available under the Canada Assistance Plan, C.A.P. While this municipality has publicly identified the need to exempt designated neighbourhoods with high concentrations of special needs families from the needs testing provisions required under the Ontario C.A.P. Agreement, Council has not publicly endorsed the abolition of either the current Ontario agreement or the entire federal C.A.P. cost-sharing mechanism.

The Department is concerned that the recommendation to review and revise C.A.P. be given formal Council support.

(2) Work Place Day Care

In the revised submission a section pertaining to "Work Place Day Care" has been added and includes a declared commitment that Metropolitan Toronto play a lead role in initiating and expanding work place day care across the municipality. While several cities within Metropolitan Toronto have undertaken such a role within their jurisdictional borders, Metropolitan Toronto Council has not explicitly declared its intent to explore such a strategy.

The Department recommends that Council clarify its intent in this regard.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Community Services & Housing Committee:

(1) approve the revised brief to the Federal Task Force on Child Care and authorize its submission to the appropriate federal authorities;

(2) recommend that Metropolitan Toronto Council officially declare support for the following suggestions it contains:

(a) a new uniform Canada-wide system of cost sharing for child care; and

(b) the assumption by the Corporation of a lead role in initiating and expanding work place day care across the municipality; and

(3) authorize the appropriate Metropolitan Officials to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

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Approved: J. R. Bicherack
J. R. Bicherack
Commissioner of Community Services

Appendix I

Proposed Submission for the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto to the Federal Task Force on Child Care

Introduction:

In June 1984 when The Honourable Judy Erola, then federal Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, released the terms of reference for the federal Task Force on Child Care, announced its appointed four-person membership and invited public submissions, Metropolitan Toronto began to prepare a brief. The Municipality was pleased at the prospect of sharing Council's position on a number of contemporary day care issues.

Metropolitan Toronto applauds the establishment of the new parliamentary task force announced in the November 1984 Speech from the Throne sharing as it does the federal government's recognition of the need for accessible affordable child care. Metropolitan Toronto anticipates that this parliamentary task force will provide an opportunity for even fuller participation in the planned review of the future of child care in Canada.

Metropolitan Toronto also welcomes the review of social programmes announced in the budget and supports a revamping of federal spending which would ensure that those client groups which have been identified as most needing subsidized day care have this service available to them. The client groups so identified include sole support parents where the provision of day care allows them to enter the paid labour market and/or upgrading and training courses; children with special needs such as developmental delays and behavioural problems; and two parent families where both parents are in the paid labour market but their incomes are not such that they can afford good day care.

Good day care is a particularly urgent need in Metropolitan Toronto. While this urban region enjoys a lower unemployment rate than most other areas in Canada, it is confronted by extremely high living costs and a severe lack of affordable housing. In most families, it is necessary for two parents to work in order to maintain an acceptable lifestyle for their children. Single parents are confronted by even more formidable problems. In Metropolitan Toronto, one in six children is in a family led by a single parent, 83 per cent. of whom are women. Data from the 1981 Census indicate that in the City of Toronto alone there are approximately 8,000 single parents potentially eligible for subsidized day care.

Statistics prepared by the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Department indicate a 75 per cent. labour participation rate by women of child-bearing age residing in Metropolitan Toronto. The demand and need for good child care is an ever increasing reality in Metropolitan Toronto.

Background:

Since 1967 when the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto first assumed from the City of Toronto responsibility for the operation of 12 day nurseries providing subsidized day care to families in need, the Corporation has been dedicated to the provision of quality child care. In 1968 Metropolitan Council expanded the range of service options available to parents by approving the purchasing of day care service from private operators. In 1969 three new additional municipal day care centres were added then 11 others in 1971 under a provincial capital works program. In 1971 the Corporation began to purchase Private Home Day Care (PHDC) services and then in 1975 established its own municipally operated PHDC program. By so doing, eligible parents were assured the widest possible choice of service options including directly operated group and PHDC and purchased group and PHDC.

Six more municipal centres were added in 1974. The integrated program for developmentally handicapped children was instituted in 1980 and today has grown to a program which serves over 50 children. The overall subsidy space ceiling has continued to grow over the years and in 1984 reached 10,332 spaces.

The growth in quality, quantity and diversity of subsidized day care in Metropolitan Toronto has been the result of the coordinated efforts of an active and motivated community of service consumers and providers, a creative and committed Municipal Council and a team of dedicated and experienced professional staff.

In addition to sharing Metropolitan Toronto's declared position on such key child care issues as:

- quality of care
- range of choice
- age appropriate care
- service to special needs families
- availability
- accessibility
- affordability

Metropolitan Toronto would also like to identify some additional issues currently under review and consideration. These include:

- strategies as an employer for assisting employees with child care needs (extended maternity leave, work sharing, support for work related day care);

- an exploration of the most appropriate role for the municipality in the administration or support of informal child care alternatives;

- an exploration of the use of area municipalities as the local planning base for meeting child care needs assessed at a neighbourhood level thus promoting community ownership of child care problems and programs.

Metropolitan Toronto's Position on Key Day Care Issues

(1) Quality Child Care

Metropolitan Toronto is proud of the high quality of subsidized day care provided in the municipality. To ensure consistent high standards across all service options, Metropolitan Council approved Program Criteria more stringent than the provincial licencing regulations. All day care programs awarded purchase of service contacts with the Municipality, as well as the municipally operated programs, are monitored quarterly for adherence to these standards. A copy of the Metropolitan Program Criteria is shown in Appendix A.

The quality issue is of such importance to the Municipality because of Metropolitan Toronto's long-standing and enduring commitment to children. In its initial response to the then proposed provincial Children's Act, Metropolitan Toronto reaffirmed its belief that the safety and well-being of the children served in the programs are of paramount importance.

(2) Age-appropriate Child Care

Metropolitan Toronto is also aware of the need for age appropriate child care services for the children it serves. There is a decided shortage of subsidy spaces for infants. For every 1 infant placed there are 10 eligible and waiting for service. In its 1983 declaration of day care service priorities the Metropolitan Toronto Council gave priority to the provision of subsidized care to infants and preschoolers. To this end the Municipality has established a preferred rate for providers of infant care in Private Home Day Care, has authorized the re-opening of 3 infant programs in municipal centres and is actively considering subsidy contract requests from private centres in the community which serve infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers.

At the same time the municipality is also aware of the continuing needs of school-aged children for age appropriate and programatically appealing day care before and after school. Because so many innovative child care programs have been developed by other groups in the community such as Boards of Education, the local Parks and Recreation Departments and agencies like the Y.M.C.A., Metropolitan Toronto is currently engaged in a joint needs assessment and planning venture with local providers and consumers of school-aged day care. Each of the six area municipalities, in consultation with local constituency groups, is compiling a service development strategy for school-age child care which meets community needs and utilizes or develops local resources.

Area Boards of Education appear to have an increasing awareness of the problems confronting the parents of the children they serve. Several signficant local initiatives have been taken which will improve the situation for the school-age child and, in some communities, the pre-schooler as well.

Lunch programs are mandatory in Ontario and both the Board of Education for the City of Toronto and the Board of Education for the City of North York have passed policies that encourage and support the development of Day Care Programs in their facilities. A more complete discussion of this policy may be found in Appendix F. The Board of Education for the City of York, through its Learning Enrichment Foundation, has developed a similar role. In addition, the York Board has been scheduling continuing education activities after school.

Local Parks and Recreation Departments have also developed innovative and low cost programs in consultation with and in response to particular needs identified in various communities. Appendix G contains a discussion of the child care role played by the North York Parks and Recreation Department. These recreation programs are meeting the need for supervised care for children in some neighbourhoods and addressing the problem of latch-key children in others.

(3) Parental Choice of Child Care Arrangements

The Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, in its provision of subsidized day care, serves children in the context of their families. In 1983 the Municipality confirmed its belief in the rights and responsibility of parents to make the best day care decisions possible for their children with the articulation of the informed parental choice policy.

Under the Metropolitan system, subsidy spaces are assigned to eligible parents who may then utilize them in any day care program on the Municipal Registry. Programs must first meet the Metropolitan Program Criteria before they may be listed for selection. To aid parents in making as informed a decision as possible, the Municipality has developed and uses a sound slide show to teach parents how to choose quality day care. Parents are then given the checklist shown in Appendix B and encouraged to visit a number of centres to compare and assess different programs before making a placement decision. Children from eligible families are then admitted to the chosen program on a "first come first served" basis.

To ensure that parents have the broadest range of choice possible, Metropolitan Toronto has contracts with over 250 centres and 6 agencies, in addition to its own 34 municipally operated centres and Metropolitan Private Home Day Care program. These purchase of service contracts encompass both non-profit and commercial operations and include parent co-operatives and half-day nursery schools. Some are school based, some are close to the work place and many are neighbourhood based. Great care is taken to ensure the best possible match of program with the individual needs of all eligible families.

(4) Child Care for Special Needs Families

Metropolitan Toronto is sensitive to the diverse and varying needs of families. It has had a long and impressive record of service to sole support parents, two-parent low-income families and families with special needs. The subsidized day care program continues to be a parental support service to potentially abusive families serving in many cases as court-ordered parent relief. In other cases, Metropolitan Toronto's subsidized day care program is an adjunct and aid to the income maintenance program assisting parents on social assistance to find and maintain gainful employment.

The municipally operated day care program, through its association with specialty agencies, has served as an early identification and intervention service for children with special needs. In addition to this primary prevention focus, the municipal centres also provide effective therapeutic intervention and habilitation for physically and developmentally handicapped children integrated into its regular service program.

A number of designated neighbourhoods with particularly high concentrations of special needs families have been identified across Metropolitan Toronto. The cumbersome and expensive needs testing approach utilized in Ontario to determine eligibility for subsidized day care, coupled with the scarcity of subsidy spaces, makes serving such neighbourhoods difficult. Metropolitan Toronto supports a review of the current terms of our federal-provincial cost-sharing agreement under the Canada Assistance Plan, C.A.P., to identify more efficient ways of providing subsidized child care in these high risk neighbourhoods. Perhaps a federal grant program to be administered by area municipalities could be used to encourage local needs assessment and the development of neighbourhood based child care services.

Metropolitan Toronto is also concerned about the current lack of child care funding equity across the country and supports the need for a uniform Canada-wide system. The Corporation suggests that the current cost sharing available to the provinces under C.A.P. be reviewed and revised.

(5) Availability of Adequate Child Care

The availability of an adequate number of licenced spaces to meet the needs of eligible families has long been a declared goal of Metropolitan Toronto. In 1979 the Municipality commissioned a Day Care Planning Task Force to identify and assess level of need and to develop a multi-year strategy for the planned expansion of subsidized day care. A copy of the Final Report of this Task Force is shown in Appendix C.

In 1980 the Metropolitan Toronto Council passed the following motion in support of continuing expansion of subsidized day care programs:

"that the Province of Ontario be advised that the Metropolitan Council strongly supports the expansion of subsidized day care programmes for all parents of children who require subsidized day care in Metropolitan Toronto, conditional upon normal provincial funding"

As demonstrated again in 1983 and 1984, Council upheld the original Task Force recommendations and approved an expansion strategy designed to give all eligible families a subsidized day care space. However, provincial funding restraints have restricted this planned and needed growth. Within Metropolitan Toronto at any given time there are at least 1,200 eligible families on a waiting list for a subsidy space. This statistic under-represents the demand as long delays in receiving service discourage many potential clients from seeking an eligibility assessment. Many turn in desperation to unregulated and non-subsidized alternatives.

(6) Affordability

In spite of strong local support for day care expansion the demand for licenced day care far outstrips the supply. The Metropolitan Toronto Day Care Planning Task Force in its 1981 report estimated that only 6.8 per cent. of the 250,000 children aged 0-9 residing in Metropolitan Toronto were in licenced care. Of the 17,000 children in licenced care, only 3,000 were paying full fee.

The Municipality clearly recognizes that the affordability of quality day care is rapidly becoming one of the key problems in this service sector today. Quality licenced day care is priced out of the range of many middle income families who do not qualify under the provincial needs test for subsidy assistance. In October 1982, the Municipality adopted a report, shown in Appendix D, entitled the "Day Care Affordability Study. This study showed that licenced day care is highly fee sensitive. It reports that both those on the borderline of eligibility for subsidy for whom day care was a major financial burden and middle income parents were only prepared to spend marginally more on day care than they were currently spending. Similarly, a North York study entitled "Toward a Coordinated Child Care System in North York" and shown in Appendix H concluded that "licenced and supervised day care is increasingly for the children of the poor or affluent. The middle income family must shop around for the lowest cost informal care".

The average non-subsidized family in Metropolitan Toronto pays $75.00 to $135.00 per week per child for day care depending on the age of the child. Yearly, families may be paying approximately $7,000.00 per child for day care. For some middle income families, day care fees amount to approximately 30 per cent. of their take home pay. As fees rise, more and more middle income families are squeezed out and are forced to rely on babysitters, family and, in some cases, older children to meet their child care needs.

(7) Salaries of Day Care Workers

Also related to the affordability issue are the salaries paid to day care workers. Most day care workers in Metropolitan Toronto earn approximately half of what a kindergarten teacher receives, even though their educational qualifications are similar.

Very low salaries of day care workers and the unaffordability of day care for middle income families prompted the City of Toronto Council to adopt a grants program to help raise salaries of day care workers. Provincial legislation requires day care workers to have at least a two-year diploma or degree in early childhood education or an assessed equivalent yet annual salaries of between $10,000 and $15,000 are the norm. Since salary costs make up the largest part of a day care centre's operating budget, the City Council agreed to subsidize day care salaries to help keep increases in day care fees to a minimum. A full discussion of this City of Toronto initiative is contained in Appendix I.

(8) Work Place Day Care

Within Metropolitan Toronto, the City of Toronto pioneered work place day care with the opening of Hester How Day Care Centre in City Hall four years ago. The centre serves the needs of 50 children whose parents work in City Hall and the adjacent area.

In 1982, the City of Toronto created the position of Coordinator of Work-Related Day Care to promote work related day care in the business community and to offer technical assistance and advice to employees interested in establishing work place day care centres. Concrete proposals for eight such centres were stimulated.

A similar initiative in the City of Scarborough is also having favourable results. Metropolitan Toronto is continuing the commitment to initiate and expand work place day care across the municipality.

Some Additional Child Care Issues
Under Review In Metropolitan Toronto

(1) Employees' Child Care Needs

Metropolitan Toronto, as an equal opportunity employer, is interested in reviewing ways of assisting its employees to meet successfully the challenges of both career and family. To this end it has been suggested that the following issues be reviewed by both management and labour:

(a) Extended maternity leave to allow new parents to choose to remain at home longer without jeopardizing their seniority, job security or benefits.

(b) A job sharing plan which would allow parents to choose to work a reduced work day or work week.

(c) Corporate support for work related day care as a support to employees whose children require supervised care during the working day.

(2) Informal Day Care

Another initiative just undertaken by Metropolitan Toronto is a review of the municipal role in the provision of informal day care. Terms of Reference (shown in Appendix E) have just been approved and the Municipality, in concert with the community, will be actively reviewing the potential and problems associated with publicly assisted but unregulated child care.

Metropolitan Toronto has already had some experience on a pilot basis as a result of its involvement with the provincially sponsored Employment Support Initiative. While the majority of these project participants have their child care needs met through the formal subsidy system, the project has the added flexibility of providing financial assistance to cover "babysitting costs" up to $10.00 per day as part of employment related expenses.

While some families are fortunate in having a reliable relative, neighbour or hired nanny who can provide good quality care for their children, for many families child care remains a problem. Some resort to using unsatisfactory, unregulated private arrangements. Others may become involved in harbouring and exploiting illegal immigrants to provide the needed child care at sub-standard wages. For others it means that children may be left on their own before and after school and be given the added responsibility of caring for younger brothers and sisters. For an alarming number of families it can mean unstable and unstimulating environments for their children in their formative years.

Conclusion

Metropolitan Toronto administers approximately 50 per cent. of the subsidized day care spaces in the Province of Ontario. It is committed to the continued provision of quality care to children and strives to make the widest range of service options available to parents making program selection decisions. The Municipality endeavours to ensure that there is an adequate supply of subsidy spaces available to meet the needs of all families assessed as eligible. Metropolitan Toronto continues to search for ways to improve the process of eligibility assessment and continues to discuss with the Province ways of improving the cost sharing formula to make affordable quality day care accessible to many more families who need and want it. Metropolitan Toronto supports the principle of universal access to good child care and suggests that this be the primary goal of a national child care policy.

Metropolitan Toronto will also continue to explore ways of extending its support for a comprehensive child care system through a review of its own policies as an equal opportunity employers and through the deliberation of its potential role in unregulated child care.

Metropolitan Toronto endorses the creation of the new Parliamentary Task Force and is anxious to offer its full assistance and cooperation as the future of child care in Canada is explored.